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M. Speaker,

We meet today on the fourth day of the fifth year of the war in Iraq, a conflict that has gone on longer than the Korean War, longer even than World War II - that war being fought against the greatest threat to American national security in history.

The scenarios painted by politicians here about the war in Iraq don't affect the men and women fighting it or living in it. Soldiers and civilians live in the world as it really is.

What is that reality?

This is a war that is being fought by soldiers who often do not have the equipment they need or the care they are owed, that is not improving the security of the Iraqi people, that is depleting our military and endangering the security of this

nation, and that is to this day based on a flawed strategy that desperately needs to be changed.

Under such circumstances, for this Congress to support an open-ended commitment to this conflict, passing yet another blank check, as past Congresses have done - it would be a dereliction of duty.

By contrast, passing a bill that has a chance of changing a stagnant situation in Iraq is not micromanaging. It is living up to what we owe our soldiers and the Iraqi people: to give them a fighting chance of success.

This supplemental makes America's continued involvement in Iraq conditional on the situation there improving.

America's soldiers will no longer be asked to fight in an open-ended war whose goal line keeps moving.

This bill will require Iraqi leaders to make the political compromises necessary to produce a working government, or else risk losing America's military support. It will require the President's own security benchmarks to be met if American soldiers are to continue sacrificing their safety for that goal.

And it will be the first step toward ending the war. Ending this flawed conflict is crucial not just for Iraq, but also to the

future of our own military - and hence to our own national security. This Congress was aghast when it learned of conditions at Walter Reed. But every day, the men and women of our military are suffering beyond reason.

Let me briefly share one story with you that I recently heard, the story of a young lieutenant currently awaiting his second deployment to Iraq. His first tour saw him bravely patrolling dangerous streets north of Baghdad. He returned last December, expecting a year on base during which to rest and train a new platoon.

Instead, with the escalation in place, he will be heading back months sooner. The soldiers under his command are not getting the time they need to train properly for their mission.

The vehicles and equipment they use to train for war are failing and often break. They are physically weary, many still suffering from the lingering effects of leg and back injuries. Others are in counseling for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Most of the soldiers who were married before the war are now divorced. Their lives outside of this conflict are coming apart.

This lieutenant and his soldiers personify sacrifice. They never complain. When those in the military are given a mission, he told me, they find a way to complete it. That creed is why our armed forces are so strong.

But what this officer did tell me is that our Armed Forces cannot go on like this. He said that we are in danger of destroying our system of national defense. We see soldiers sent back for tour after tour after tour, some too injured to wear body armor. Our services are desperately trying to find a way to meet new troop requirements.

M. Speaker, this war is a dramatic misuse of our military. In the name of our national security, it is undermining the only true guarantor of national security that we have: our armed forces. And for four years, this Congress let it happen.

But not any more. Today, the House will finally recognize that our military is at the breaking point not because of any inherent weakness, but because it is being asked to complete a flawed mission.

And so, that mission must change.

Let me add as well that while our soldiers may stoically bear the burdens of short leaves and shoddy equipment, that in no way means we in Congress should.

This bill respects our men and women in uniform enough to put their needs at the forefront of our national priorities.

From now on, if they are asked to go into battle without being fully armored, fully rested, and fully trained, then the President himself will have to stand before them, look them in the eye, and explain why he thinks our national safety is worth that level of sacrifice.

The legislation will also provide desperately needed funds for veterans' health care. Our country is seeing more wounded soldiers returning from abroad than at any point in 40 years, and yet our health care system has failed thousands of them. It is unconscionable, and it is long past time that state of affairs was radically changed.

Finally, this bill both increases funding for the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and for a variety of other critically important national security objectives.

Taken together, it represents the beginning of what will be a responsible and ethical shift in our national security priorities away from a war in Iraq we can't end and back towards where it should be.

M. Speaker, this legislation is the first real chance Democrats have had since 2003 to change the course of the war in Iraq. And we intend to do it.

We will do it not because we are conceding anything to those who would do our nation harm, not because we lack the will to fight for our security, and not because, as some would have you believe, we are giving up.

With this first step, we are going to change the course of this war because the future of the people of Iraq hinges on it, because a basic level of respect for our soldiers demands it, and because the long-term security of our nation depends on it. This is an important and historic bill, and I am proud to support it. I urge all of my colleagues to do the same.

